

Global Exchange Network for Reproductive Health Latin America Virtual Conference Final Report

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THE GLOBAL EXCHANGE NETWORK'S VIRTUAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA ON "SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES TOWARD IMPROVING ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH"

CONFERENCE DATE: April 26-28, 2005

I. INTRODUCTION

In response to a request from USAID, the Management and Leadership (M&L) Program of Management Sciences for Health (MSH) created the Global Exchange Network (GEN) for Reproductive Health to support countries that no longer receive population and reproductive health funding from USAID: countries that have "graduated" from USAID assistance. The goal of the Global Exchange Network is to encourage the exchange of ideas, lessons learned and good practices in the area of reproductive health and family planning in the countries that have received or receive population funds from USAID.

One of the primary activities of the Global Exchange Network in 2004-2005 was the planning and implementation of a virtual conference led by organizations in the three "graduated countries" of Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico, and supported by MSH. The Latin American Virtual Conference was the first virtual conference to have ever been conducted by MSH and the Latin American partners. It proved highly successful and participants have requested more exchanges such as this one.

It was agreed that a three-day conference would be held and that each country would present two successful experiences or lessons learned in adolescent reproductive health where they had implemented an interesting approach and had produced demonstrated results.

II. VIRTUAL CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

The conference objectives were to:

- Transfer and share information about lessons learned in adolescent reproductive health between participants from "graduated" countries and participants from countries that still receive population and reproductive health funds from USAID.
- Stimulate interest in the subject of adolescent reproductive health.

III. METHODOLOGY

ORGANIZATION OF THE CONFERENCE

In each country, a guiding organization was identified to be responsible for obtaining consensus on the specific subject and making contact with the other institutions and people.

Once the organizations, subjects and speakers were determined, each speaker assumed responsibility for creating a PowerPoint presentation, recording an audio recording of their presentation with the support of MSH and iCohere (an institution specializing in virtual conferences), and actively responding to the participants' comments during the virtual conference.

MSH organized a team of 7 people to work on the conference and assisted with the site technology and refining the presentations. USAID provided excellent support by communicating to all of the USIAD missions in the region about the conference. The conference took place April 26 through 28, 2005, in Spanish with English translation.

iCohere was hired to provide the technical support necessary.

IV. CONTENT OF THE CONFERENCE

INSTITUTIONS, SUBJECTS, AND SPEAKERS

| INST. | SUBJECT | SPEAKER |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Management Sciences For Health | <i>Keynote Presentation: Some Lessons Learned from Sexual and Reproductive Adolescent Health Programs</i> | Susana Galdos, Conference Technical Director Principal Program Associate, MSH (Former Director of Reprosalud in Peru) |
| USAID | <i>The Importance of Adolescent Reproductive Health in Latin America</i> | Marguerite Farrell Technical Advisor on Population and Reproductive Health of the USAID Global Health Bureau |
| Mexican Ministry of Health | <i>Legal and Normative Framework for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Care</i> | Dr. Raffaella Schiavon General Deputy Director of Reproductive Health, MOH |
| CEMOPLAF, Ecuador | <i>Adolescents Playing a Leading Role in Improving Their Sexual and Reproductive Health</i> | Elsa Racines de Arellano Adolescent Program Director |
| PROFAMILIA, Colombia. | <i>Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health: An Institutional Experience</i> | Susana Moya National Director PROFAMILIA, Colombia |
| Fundación ESQUEL Ecuador | <i>Sexual and Reproductive Health, Ecuador: Successful Strategies for Sustainable Activities with Adolescents</i> | Dr. Soledad Guayasamín |
| MEXFAM Mexico | <i>Working for Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young People</i> | Pilar Morales. Adolescent Program Director |
| Ser Humano Barranquilla Colombia | <i>Youth in Action for Life</i> | Diego Arbelaez Muñoz Chairman, Corporación Ser Humano |

V. VIRTUAL CONFERENCE RESULTS

LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

156 people from 20 countries (including 16 Latin American countries) participated in the conference.

Table 1: Participants by Country

| Country | Number of participants | <u>Percentage of total participants</u> |
|----------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Argentina | 3 | |
| Bolivia | 6 | 4% |
| Brasil | 2 | |
| Chile | 1 | |
| Colombia | 18 | 12% |
| Costa Rica | 2 | |
| Ecuador | 13 | 8% |
| El Salvador | 1 | |
| Spain | 1 | |
| Guatemala | 3 | 2% |
| Honduras | 4 | 3% |
| Mexico | 37 | 24% |
| Morocco | 1 | |
| Nicaragua | 10 | 6% |
| Peru | 43 | 28% |
| Puerto Rico | 1 | |
| Switzerland | 1 | |
| Uruguay | 2 | |
| USA | 7 | 4% |
| Total | 156 | |

The participants entered the conference Web site 433 times. This is an average of 2.6 visits per participant. Almost 25% of the participants entered 4 or more times. Upon each entry to the site, participants were able to read and participate in the presentation discussions for that day, which indicates that almost all participants followed all of the presentations. A total of 398 messages were posted.

PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF THE CONFERENCE

The participants were asked to complete questionnaires about the conference in order for MSH, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico to help determine if the conference achieved its objectives. 42 questionnaires were received.

| | Excellent | Very Good | Good |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------|
| Their experience as a participant: | 19 | 17 | 6 |
| The quality of the presentations: | 18 | 21 | 3 |

Many of the responses emphasized the virtual conference technology (which made it possible to log onto the site when one was able to and participant in discussions with the participants) and the diverse approaches and quality of the presentations.

The quotes below, taken from the online discussions as well as the participant surveys, show the level of interaction and participants' appreciation for the quality of the virtual conference and its methodology:

"... the question addresses how to be able to perform diagnostic HIV tests on minors when we have no parent or guardian for the adolescents to authorize the tests. What legal grounds can we use so that there are no legal repercussions for us as medical professionals."—Conference participant

"I will be able to share what I learned today with my colleagues in the youth development center."—Conference participant

"Also, I congratulate and thank you for the important initiative of the conference. It is an invaluable opportunity to share experiences and learning that has given me a broad perspective of how it is working in Latin America."—Conference participant

"Thank you for sharing such an enriching experience with those working with youths."—Conference participant

"Congratulations Susana, not only for your good opening lecture, but for all the work on creating, organizing and making this conference a reality. Thank you for inviting me to participate, thank you for giving me the opportunity to meet people from different parts of the world who are fighting for better sexual and reproductive health opportunities for youth."—Conference participant

"We are a group of adolescents following the conference in Ecuador."—Conference participant

"In the presentation, you mentioned that 4,146 youths have been trained in the neighborhoods, which is a large number of youths. I would like for you to discuss the strategies [used] to bring youths together in such a successful way."—Conference participant

"With regard to community condom distribution...If there is a specific location, doesn't this interfere with confidentiality? Don't the rest of the boys or even the teachers discriminate against or judge them for visiting this place?"—Conference participant

“Congratulations on the work that is being done. Through your experience, I would like for you to give me suggestions on working on this subject with Amazonian and Quechua university students.” —Conference participant

*“Hello everyone. Congratulations to the speakers. I am pleased to participate in this exchange. **We are a group of people who work in the National Family Development System in Mexico and we are listening to and watching the conference.**” —Conference participant*

*“I work for Plan International **Haiti** as a national level health advisor. Congratulations on your presentation on the institutional experience. I strongly support the perspective of integrated services according to the model presented, with youth participation...I would like to ask what are understood as “favorable social environments” and in the same sense, how were these unfavorable social environments able to become favorable?” —Conference participant*

“With regard to Friendly Pharmacies, what was the biggest difficulty in their implementation and the development of this strategy?” —Conference participant

“I would like to know how to do an internship in some of your facilities and be able to observe how your clinical services for adolescents work, since this is one of the weaknesses that we have in our clinic.” —Conference participant

Please see Annex 1 for more participant feedback on the conference.

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR OTHER VIRTUAL CONFERENCES AND EXCHANGES

Participants suggested a number of topics for additional virtual exchange in the future:

- *“Address diversity and intercultural issues.”*
- *“I would be interested in hearing about work with women and children who live in situations with family violence.”*
- *“Care models and successful experiences in working with victims of sexual violence (women and minors)”*
- *“Sexual and reproductive rights and their relationship to the Millennium Goals.”*
- *“The issue of abortion in Latin America.”*
- *“Initiatives that promote youth leadership, volunteerism, lifestyles that incorporate not only SRH, but also other aspects such as employment, the environment, art, the use of spare time and time.”*
- *“Effective interventions to reduce maternal mortality.”*
- *“One interesting possibility would be the opportunity to discuss comprehensive sexual education for youths, providers and adults.”*
- *“The subject of self esteem, assertiveness and resilience.”*
- *“Learning about experiences working with non-heterosexual adolescents.”*
- *“Alternatives for promotion and prevention of STI/HIV/AIDS in marginalized groups. Advantages of STI syndromic management in youths.”*
- *“Intercultural issues.”*

USE OF KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION FROM THE CONFERENCE

The majority of the virtual conference participants noted that the knowledge and information gained from the conference would be helpful to their work in both the academic and services areas, as per below:

*"This material is going to be disseminated in workshops with the members of the Foundation and adolescents from the communities where we carry out our work."
"In the work I carry out in my work with adolescents and youths."*

"As a university instructor, in the different subjects for which I am responsible."

"On the instructor level, with the group of students from the graduate infirmity workshop who perform practical work with the community."

"I have already started using it in the daily work of the Ministry of Health in order to begin the Susana Galdos lecture; it will be nationalized with the regional directors of the Adolescent Life stage."

"Overall, including it in academic courses."

"I am going to use it a lot in my work. I am going to use the presentations and documents from the library as work tools. I have downloaded many of them to my computer and I am also going to request materials from some of the participants."

"In the projects I coordinate, especially the information related to male adolescents and sexual and reproductive health."

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The conference met its principle objectives of transferring and sharing information and lessons learned in adolescent reproductive health between participants from "graduated" countries and participants from countries that still receive population and reproductive health funds from USAID, creating a space for exchange between professionals in the field of reproductive health and stimulating interest in the subject of the reproductive health of adolescents.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. The virtual exchanges function well in Latin American countries to disseminate and share ideas, successes and difficulties. Contrary to what was believed, less than 10% of participants had trouble entering the virtual conference Web site.
2. People who work in reproductive health organizations are very willing to give their time and share their experiences. All of the presenters from Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico donated their time for the initial discussions about the conference, the preparation of their power point presentations, the creation of an audio recording of their presentations, and their presence online throughout the conference to respond to participants' questions and comments in the online discussions following each presentation. It is important, however, to consistently

follow-up with partners in the planning and implementation phases of a virtual exchange event to ensure that the program is successful.

3. Participants actively participated in the conference, following the discussions and posing questions.
4. There are many opinions about how long the conference should last, but no conclusions. It appears that the second day recorded the most participation and the third day had the lowest attendance.
5. People are anxious to engage in more high quality virtual exchanges.

ANNEX 1: Feedback from Conference Evaluation Questionnaire from Conference Participants

WHAT I LIKED MOST

The majority indicated the virtual conference technology and online discussions were excellent, as well as the quality of the presentations, as noted below:

"The online discussion. The easy access (my first time with this type of experience)."

*"In our office, we have connected the computer to a post, **and this has made it possible for a group of employees to share in the presentations.**" –participant in Mexico*

"The lectures and transcriptions are available at any time, according to each person's times and needs."

"The opportunity to exchange opinions with presenters, something that is often impossible with traditional (not virtual) conferences."

"Listening to the lecture and having the opportunity to ask questions or make comments. The nice thing about the virtual conference is the quality of the presentations, the fact that the speakers respond to the comments, international participation, EVERYTHING."

WHAT I LIKED LEAST

Nine responses indicated that they like everything or that there was not anything they did not like. The rest of the responses noted technical difficulties on the one hand and the need for more time and more subjects.

"I had some trouble with the sound and there were lectures that presented information very fast."

"I think that there should be more presentations."

"The lack of ease in interactive online spaces."

"I think it would have been useful to have one more conference day so that the other participants could present their work experiences."

OTHER

There are a variety of ideas among the feedback, the majority of which concern continuing to hold virtual conferences. Others note:

"Due to the importance of the subject, the Global Exchange network activity must be continued with semi-annual events."

"It would be good to have a directory and perhaps some type of virtual report to send to everyone who participated in one way or another."

"I suggest opening independent chat rooms for each presentation rather than online discussions. This would provide good organization."

"It would be good to have more resources in the library to download to our files."

"I do not know how to do so, but it is very difficult to participate for three consecutive days. Perhaps, the conference could be one day per week..."

"I think that the conferences and databases should become a permanent page for the entire public to consult freely. The directory should be able to be downloaded and/or printed."

"I think that it would be a good idea to include a youth forum or for them to present reports where they assess what is done for them and the work of youth promoters."

EVALUATION OF THE PRESENTERS

The majority of evaluations agree that the quality of the presenters and presentations was excellent or very good.

ANNEX 2: RESULTS OF THE MSH TEAM'S AFTER ACTION REVIEW

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Over 300 people enrolled in the conference and 156 participated.
- All speakers were on time. This is particularly significant, when one considers that it was unpaid work and required several days of preparation and dedication.
- All speakers answered the participants' questions.
- Over 50% of the people registered entered the conference and actively participated.
- The technical support worked from iCoHere was excellent.
- The participants evaluated the conference positively. They want to have other similar conferences and appreciated in particular the ability to have direct contact with the presenters, the diversity as well as the quality of the presentations.
- All participants noted their appreciation and delight with using this technique, the virtual space, and indicated a variety of advantages in its use.
- Excellent support and communication with USAID and with the speakers and their institutions.

CHALLENGES

- Some communications were not clear, in particular those related to using the technology to enter the conference Web site.
- Some requirements took a lot of time and effort, for example signing the letter of commitment, reviewing the list of participants.